Amendments to the Claims

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims

1.   (currently amended) A system wherein a participant interacts with an evolving story line that includes at least one virtual character, comprising:

a system manager including memory and a processing unit, the system manager containing information about at least one virtual character in the evolving story line, and being connected to at least one form of media and at least one participant;

a message from a virtual character in the evolving story line sent by the system manager to the participant that conveys information of the story line;

a response sent by the participant to the system manager that responds to the message from the virtual character; and

a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character sent by the system manager that furthers the story line based on the participant's response;

wherein the message, the response and the subsequent message are sent while the participant interacts with the evolving story line.

2.   (previously presented) The system of claim 1 wherein the message is an e-mail.

3.   (previously presented) The system of claim 1 wherein the message includes a hyperlink that reflects a possible response by the participant.

4.   (previously presented) The system of claim 3 wherein the participant is directed to the web page by clicking on the hyperlink.

5.   (previously presented) The system of claim 1, wherein the system manager includes a timer, wherein a signal is transmitted from the participant to the system manager upon the participant's review of the message and wherein the timer provides the participant with a certain amount of time to respond.

6.   (currently amended) A system for providing an interactive story line having a plurality of routes, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with <u>one or more virtual characters that are part of</u> the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the system comprising:

a system manager that stores information about the story line<u>, including information about the one or more virtual characters</u>;

a message from <u>a virtual character sent by the</u> system manager to the participant that seeks a response by the participant; and

a response by the participant to the message <u>from the virtual character</u> that represents how the participant's character interacts with the <u>virtual character of the</u> story line and that is provided to the system manager;

wherein the system manager progresses the story line along a route based on the participant's response.

7.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, further comprising:

a subsequent message from <u>the same or a different virtual character sent by</u> the system manager to the participant that has content depending on the participant's response and that seeks a subsequent response by the participant; and

a subsequent response by the participant that represents how the participant's character interacts with the content of the subsequent message and that is provided to the system manager;

wherein the system manager further progresses the story line along a route based on the participant's subsequent response.

8.   (previously presented) The system of claim 7, further comprising:

a timer that notes when the message is sent to the participant, when the participant reviews the message or when the participant responds to the message;

wherein the system manager sends the subsequent message a certain time after the message is sent to the participant, a certain time after the participant reviews the message, or a certain time after the participant responds to the message.

9.   (previously presented) The system of claim 7, further comprising:

additional subsequent messages from the one or more virtual characters sent by the system manager to the participant that have content depending on the participant's prior responses and that seek subsequent responses by the participant; and

additional subsequent responses by the participant that represent how the participant's character interacts with the content of the additional subsequent messages and that are provided to the system manager;

wherein the system manager further progresses the story line along a route to the story line's interim or final conclusion based on the participant's additional subsequent responses.

10.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message is in the form of an e-mail, video mail, voice mail, instant message, fax or phone message.

11.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message is in the form of an e-mail containing a hyperlink to a web page, and the participant visits the web page to obtain information about the story line.

12.   (previously presented) The system of claim 11, wherein the web page includes a textual, video, graphical or audio description of another character in the story line.

13.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message is personalized by indicating the participant's real-life name or the participant's real-life address.

14.   (cancelled)

15.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the system administrator includes a server.

16.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message and response between the system manager and participant are exchanged over the Internet.

17.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6, wherein the message and response between the system manager and participant are exchanged using wireless communication.

18.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6 wherein the story line is educational, erotic, historical or involves espionage.

19.   (previously presented) The system of claim 6 wherein the role of the character in the story line assumed by the participant is the participant's real-life identity.

20.   (previously presented) The system of claim 11, wherein the web page contains information regarding actual events occurring in reality and fictional information that describes the story line.

21.   (currently amended) A method for providing an interactive story line having a plurality of routes and one or more virtual characters, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with one or more virtual characters in the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the method comprising:

storing information about the story line, including information about one or more virtual characters;

sending a message from a virtual character to the participant that seeks a response by the participant;

receiving a response by the participant to the message that represents how the participant's character interacts with the virtual character of the story line; and

progressing the story line along a route based on the participant's response

22.   (currently amended) The method of claim 21, further comprising:

sending a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character to the participant that contains content depending on the participant's response and that seeks a subsequent response by the participant;

receiving a subsequent response by the participant that represents how

the participant's character interacts with the content contained in the subsequent

message; and

further progressing the story line along a route based on the participant's

subsequent response.

23.   (previously presented) The system of claim 22, further comprising:

noting when the message is sent to the participant, when the participant

reviews the message or when the participant responds to the message; and

sending the subsequent message a certain time after the message is sent

to the participant, a certain time after the participant reviews the message, or a certain

time after the participant responds to the message.

24.   (currently amended) The method of claim 22, further comprising:

sending additional subsequent messages from the same or different

virtual characters to the participant that have content depending on the participant's

prior responses and that seek subsequent responses by the participant;

receiving additional subsequent responses by the participant that

represent how the participant's character interacts with the content of the additional

subsequent messages; and

further progressing the story line along a route to the story line's interim or

final conclusion based on the participant's additional subsequent responses.

25.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein sending the

message comprises sending an e-mail, video mail, voice mail, instant message, fax or

phone message.

26.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message is in the form of an e-mail containing a hyperlink to a web page, and the participant visits the web page to obtain information about the story line.

27.   (previously presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the web page includes a textual, video, graphical or audio description of another character in the story line.

28.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message is personalized by indicating the participant's real-life name or the participant's real-life address.

29.   (cancelled)

30.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the information about the story line is stored on a server.

31.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message and response are exchanged over the Internet.

32.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the message and response are exchanged using wireless communication.

33.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the story line is educational, erotic, historical or involves espionage.

34.   (previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the role of the character in the story line assumed by the participant is the participant's real-life identity.

35.   (previously presented) The method of claim 26, wherein the web page contains information regarding actual events occurring in reality and fictional information that describes the story line.

36.   (currently amended) A system for providing an interactive story line having a plurality of routes, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with <u>one or more virtual characters in</u> the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the system comprising:

a system manager that stores information about the story line<u>, including information about one or more virtual characters</u>;

an informational message from the system manager to the participant that provides information about the story line but that does not seek a response by the participant;

a response-seeking message from <u>a virtual character sent by</u> the system manager to the participant that seeks a response by the participant; and

a response by the participant to the response-seeking message that represents how the participant's character interacts with the <u>virtual character in the</u> story line and that is provided to the system manager;

wherein the system manager progresses the story line along a route based on the participant's response

37.   (currently amended) A system for providing an interactive story line having a plurality of routes, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with <u>one or more virtual characters in</u> the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the system comprising:

a system manager that stores information about the story line<u>, including information about one or more virtual characters</u>;

a message from a virtual character sent by the system manager to the participant that seeks a response by the participant;

a response by the participant to the message that represents how the participant's character interacts with the virtual character in the story line and that is provided to the system manager; and

a timer that notes when the message is sent to the participant, when the participant reviews the message or when the participant responds to the message;

wherein the system manager progresses the story line along a route by sending a subsequent message from the same or a different virtual character to the participant, the subsequent message having content based on the participant's response, and being sent a certain time after the message was sent to the participant, a certain time after the participant reviewed the message, or a certain time after the participant responded to the message.

38. (previously presented) The system of claim 37, wherein the system manager tracks the participant's location in the story line by noting when the message was sent to the participant, when the message was reviewed by the participant, or when the message was responded to by the participant.

39. (currently amended) A system for providing an interactive story line, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with one or more virtual characters in the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the system comprising:

a system manager that stores information about the story line, including information about one or more virtual characters, and including information about a

plurality of possible routes that the story line may take as a result of the participant's interaction with the <u>virtual characters of the</u> story line;

a plurality of messages from <u>one or more virtual characters of the story line sent by</u> the system manager to the participant, wherein at least some of the messages are response-seeking messages; and

a plurality of responses by the participant to the response-seeking messages that are provided to the system manager, the plurality of responses representing how the participant's character interacts with the <u>one or more virtual characters of the</u> story line;

wherein the system manager progresses the story line along one of the plurality of possible routes stored by the system manager, the route being dependent on at least some of the participant's responses.

40. (currently amended) A system for providing an interactive story line, wherein a participant assumes the role of a character in the story line, interacts with <u>one or more virtual characters in</u> the story line and affects the progress of the story line, the system comprising:

a system manager that stores information about the story line, including information about a plurality of possible routes that the story line may take as a result of the participant's interaction with the story line<u>, and information about one or more virtual characters in the story line</u>;

a plurality of messages from <u>one or more virtual characters sent by</u> the system manager to the participant, wherein at least some of the messages are response-seeking messages, and at least one message includes a web page containing

information regarding actual events occurring in reality and fictional information that describes the story line; and

a plurality of responses by the participant to the response-seeking messages that are provided to the system manager, the plurality of responses representing how the participant's character interacts with the <u>one or more virtual characters of the</u> story line;

wherein the system manager progresses the story line along one of the plurality of possible routes stored by the system manager, the route being dependent on at least some of the participant's responses.